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It's time to compare and choose 2016 Medicare Part D plans

Consumers need to re-evaluate each year to get the best value prescription coverage plan

ANCHORAGE — The annual window for Medicare beneficiaries to review their prescription drug, or Part D, insurance plan options for next year is open until Dec. 7, 2015. Alaskans who get both Medicaid and Medicare can enroll or change plans any time.

“Consumers should always compare plans, but this year it’s more important than ever,” said Judith Bendersky of Alaska’s Medicare Information Office. “Plan premiums are trending upward for the first time in years, so are many medication costs, and most of the plans that did not have an annual deductible last year now have a \$360 deductible.”

Also, Medicare charges penalties if people don’t sign up when first eligible.

The vast majority of seniors don’t switch their plans even if by doing so they could get better, cheaper coverage, reported Kaiser Health News: Nine out of 10 Medicare drug plan enrollees stay in the same plan.

If consumers were more willing to shop for a good deal, plans would be under greater competitive pressure to offer a good deal, said Sean Cavanaugh, deputy Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services administrator and director of the Center for Medicare, according to Kaiser Health News.

For local help from trained Medicare counselors, call:

Anchorage bowl: 907-770-2027

Mat-Su: 907-373-3650

Fairbanks: 907-479-7940

Kenai Peninsula: 907-262-6333

Juneau: 907-523-4431

In the rest of the state, call Alaska’s central Medicare Information Office, 1-800-478-6065 toll-free statewide, or 269-3680 in Anchorage, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; the website is medicare.alaska.gov.

Alaska's Medicare Information Office is part of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Senior and Disabilities Services. The office’s mission is to answer Medicare-related questions year-round and prevent Medicare fraud, waste and abuse.

Medicare is a federal health insurance program for Americans 65 and older or with certain disabilities. For Medicare information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, visit medicare.gov.

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